

Statement from Robert Broadbent, president BVCS

The confirmed outbreak in August 2007 of foot and mouth disease in Surrey affects all camelid owners if only in legislative terms.

It should be assumed that the nationwide ban on animal movements includes camelids. That means that no animal can be moved on to, or off, a premise or holding without the possession of a movement licence issued either by a DEFRA vet or an LVI (local veterinary inspector) who may be your own vet. An application for a licence can be obtained through your own vet. That application can only be granted by DEFRA and, certainly in the early stages of the outbreak, may well be turned down except for movement for slaughter or treatment at a surgery.

There has been much discussion about the involvement of camelids in FMD before and since the 2001 outbreak. The general conclusion of scientists is that camelids appear not to develop the disease. DEFRA however is concerned that they have been shown, after contact with the virus, to develop a very short lived immune response. The view is that it is not possible to say that camelids cannot carry the virus. The general disease description always states that the FMD virus affects "cloven-hooved animals". This saga of discussion will run for many years to come, but the result is that DEFRA is likely to request the slaughter of camelids found within a protection zone on premises contiguous to those where an outbreak has been confirmed.

Any camelid owners who also have other cloven-hooved animals on their premises should contact their local vet about the possibility of getting the camelids into a "separate epidemiological unit" (SEU). In the event of a compulsory on-farm slaughter, DEFRA has said that it will view those animals in an SEU as a separate herd, and providing evidence is provided that the SEU is indeed separate, and has been so for the previous 30 days, those animals may then be exempt from slaughter.

[A draft letter to the DVM requesting inspection of an SEU has been on the BVCS website since 2001. Contact your DVO for up to date information]

In the event of a DEFRA request for the slaughter of camelids, your own vet should be contacted to see if this is indeed a request or if there are enforceable legislative powers to force that slaughter.

The DEFRA website is currently being updated at regular intervals and can be accessed at www.defra.gov.uk/footandmouth.

Bio-security should be utmost in everyone's minds. The FMD virus can be carried by anything that moves, so as well as being carried in large numbers by infected cattle, sheep, pigs etc, you should be very aware that your own feet, cars, lorries, your local vet, walkers and their dogs can all mechanically and unknowingly carry the virus. It is therefore imperative that until the disease is once again eradicated from the UK, camelid owners treat anything that moves as a potential carrier. The farm gates (assuming all camelid premises are called "farm") should be closed and if possible locked. There should be regularly replenished and refreshed disinfectant foot and wheel baths or mats at the entries and exits from the farm. Movements of vehicles and people onto and off the farm should be kept to the absolute minimum.

Further information and advice may be sought from any member of the British Veterinary Camelid Society. If your vet is not a member of BVCS, now might be a good moment to encourage them to join.